



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau **The Petitions Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 7 Hydref 2014
Tuesday, 7 October 2014

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The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In
addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Russell George	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Steve George	Clerc Clerk
Matthew Richards	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Kath Thomas	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 08:59.
The meeting began at 08:59.

Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Powell:** Bore da, bawb. Good morning, all. Welcome to this session of the Petitions Committee. We have no apologies this morning—we have a full complement of Members. The normal housekeeping arrangements apply, and we will move straight on.

09:00

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[2] **William Powell:** We have a couple of new petitions for this meeting. The first is P-04-600, Petition to Save General Practice. This petition was submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners and has the support of 15,000 paper signatures and more than 500 electronic signatures collected on an alternative e-petition website in support. The text reads as follows:

[3] ‘Despite carrying out 90% of all NHS patient contacts, general practice only receives 8.39% of the NHS budget in the UK—an historic low. By 2017, this is projected to plunge to just 7.29%. As a result, general practice is facing a growing crisis. Due to the sheer volume of GP workloads, in this year alone, patients will have to wait longer than a week to see their GP on at least 27m occasions. And, according to a poll carried out in March, more than three fifths of the public now believe that the number of patient consultations carried out by GPs—up to 60 per day—is threatening the level of patient care. To protect high quality services for all patients, I call on the First Minister to increase the share of the NHS budget spent on general practice in Wales to 11% by 2017.’

[4] The petition continues in a similar vein, making some additional points in support. This is our first consideration of the petition. It was presented to us on Tuesday 23 September. We had a useful opportunity to engage with the petitioners on that occasion. I propose as a first action to write to Professor Mark Drakeford, the Minister for Health and Social Services, to seek his views.

[5] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[6] **William Powell:** Are colleagues happy with that? I see that you are.

[7] Secondly, we have the more recently presented petition, which we received just last week, namely P-04-601, Proposed Ban on the Use of e-cigarettes in Public Places. This petition was submitted by Simon Thurlow and collected 1,196 signatures. The main text reads as follows:

[8] ‘We call upon the Welsh Government not to proceed with their proposed ban on the use of e-cigarettes in enclosed public spaces, substantially enclosed public places, and places of work in Wales. This proposal, if implemented, can only lead to fewer people using e-cigarettes and more people smoking cigarettes.’

[9] There is some useful additional information that has been presented there by the petitioners. We also had the opportunity to get more of a background understanding of their motivations when we met them in the Senedd just last week.

[10] **Russell George:** I suggest, Chair, that we write to the Minister for health, Mark Drakeford.

[11] **William Powell:** I am happy to endorse that. Thank you very much. That concludes the new petitions for this meeting.

09:03

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions

[12] **William Powell:** The first petition before us today is P-04-541, Support for the Mentrau Iaith (Language Initiatives). This petition was submitted by Heini Gruffudd and was first considered by us on 29 April this year. It has the support of 1,346 signatures. We have the text there in front of us as a reminder. We last considered the petition on 15 July when we agreed to write to the First Minister to get his response. We had a full response from the First Minister back in September and we have comments from the petitioners on that. Both letters are available for us today. Colleagues will note that the petitioner’s letter calls for the First Minister to give a more detailed response on the specific question of having an independent assessment of the resources needed by *mentrau iaith*. It also states a readiness to contribute more directly to the consideration of this petition should we find that to be useful. Are there any suggestions on this from colleagues?

[13] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that you have already said it.

[14] **William Powell:** Say again?

[15] **Bethan Jenkins:** Rwy’n credu dy **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that you have fod ti wedi ei ddweud yn barod. Yr unig already said it. The only suggestion in the awgrym yn y llythyr y gallaf weld yw’r letter that I can see is the independent

asesiad annibynnol o'r mentrau iaith mae'n ofyn amdano. Gallem ysgrifennu nôl at y Prif Weinidog yn gofyn a yw hynny'n bosibl. Nid wyf yn erbyn y mentrau'n dod i mewn i roi gwybodaeth ychwanegol i ni os ydym yn gweld bod hynny'n ddefnyddiol i'r hyn rydym yn ei wneud fel pwyllgor. Mae'n dibynnu ar faint o bobl eraill sydd gennym yn dod mewn yn y dyfodol agos.

assessment of the *mentrau iaith* that it is requesting. We could write back to the First Minister asking whether that is possible. I am not against the *mentrau* coming in to provide us with additional information if we see that that is going to be useful to what we are doing as a committee. It depends on how many other people we have coming in in the near future.

[16] **William Powell:** Rwy'n cytuno.

William Powell: I agree.

[17] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[18] **William Powell:** Excellent, if we adopt a step-by step-approach, firstly writing to Carwyn Jones to seek his response on that, then we will see how things follow on from that. Diolch yn fawr.

[19] The next update is to P-04-487, A Welsh Government deposit loan scheme for first time Welsh home buyers. This petition was submitted by Sovereign Wales and was first considered back in June 2013. It has the support of 17 signatures. We most recently considered it on 3 June 2014 and agreed to seek the Minister's views on the further suggestion previously submitted by the petitioner. Now we have a full response from the Minister and quite a positive tone in terms of engaging with the issue. I suppose it would be courteous to ask Sovereign Wales for its comments on what Carl Sargeant had to say.

[20] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[21] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[22] **William Powell:** Good.

[23] The next update is to P-04-511, Support for children and young people participation standards. This petition was submitted by Powys Youth Forum and was first considered on 11 November 2013. It has the support of 39 signatures. Colleagues can refresh their memory on the detail of this petition. We last considered it on 17 June of this year and agreed to ask the Minister for his response to the two suggestions made by the petitioners, particularly with regard to the kite mark, and also to seek a response from Save the Children to the committee's original letter, for which we had not received a response. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty at the time responded. We have that with us. We also have in the pack a letter we have received from Save the Children setting out its stance with regard to this. We have also had feedback from the Powys Youth Forum in addition. Potentially, it would be useful to seek the views of Children in Wales, which was successful, as colleagues will recall, in gaining the contract formerly held by Funky Dragon to see what its perspective is. Would colleagues be happy for me to write to it in this connection? Are there any other actions that you suggest?

[24] **Bethan Jenkins:** Dim ond ein bod wedi cael llythyr gan Plant yng Nghymru yng nghyd-destun y ddeiseb ar Funky Dragon a'i fod yn dweud ei fod yn mynd i ddatblygu strategaeth, o dan yr UNCRC, ar sut i gynnwys mwy o bobl ifanc yn y strategaethau. Fodd bynnag, nid yw'n sôn am y marc barcud. Felly, rwy'n credu bod angen

Bethan Jenkins: Only that we have received a letter from Children in Wales in the context of the petition on Funky Dragon and it said that it will develop a strategy, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on how to include more young people in the strategies. But, it does not mention this kite mark. So, I think that we

inni ysgrifennu yn ôl i gael mwy o fanylion am hynny. Roeddwn yn poeni braidd nad oedd wedi dweud hynny yn y llythyr ynglŷn â Funky Dragon, sef ei fod yn mynd i gadw hynny mewn cof. Felly, ysgrifennu i gael mwy o fanylion byddwn i'n ddweud.

need to write back to get more details about that. I was quite concerned that it had not said that in the letter about Funky Dragon, that is would keep that in mind. We should write to get more details about that.

[25] **William Powell:** I am very happy to do that. We have quite a detailed response to the other petition from Children in Wales, as you say, but if we write specifically drawing this one to its attention, and the issue around the kite mark, as we need to get an answer on that point. Would it also potentially be useful, given that there has been a change of Minister, to write to the new Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to find out what has been done in respect of the recommendations of the final report on the participation unit, just to make sure that nothing is lost between the change of Ministers in dealing with this petition? I see that Members are agreed.

[26] The next update is to P-04-529, A Letting Agents Ombudsman for Wales. This petition was submitted by Let Down in Cardiff and was first considered on 21 January this year. We most recently considered it in our final meeting before the summer recess on 15 July. We considered correspondence that we had received and agreed to seek the views of the Minister on feedback we had received from the petitioners. We also agreed to consider, in light of the response, whether to arrange an oral evidence session, which is an option still open to us, possibly also in association with separate, but related, petition P-04-480 on addressing private sector student housing standards. We have a response from the new Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. We have also had enclosed correspondence that was sent by a Welsh Government official to the petitioner, which, in the Minister's view, addresses those specific concerns. I would welcome a steer from colleagues on how you would like to proceed with this one. Joyce has a comment.

[27] **Joyce Watson:** I think that it might be useful, if we have the capacity, to have one evidence session. You and I cover the same area, and it is a big issue. It is a big issue just about everywhere. If there were any gaps, at least they would come out. Or, if there was an additional piece of information that might help the Minister in his deliberations, I think that everyone would find that useful.

[28] **William Powell:** Yes. So, taking the point about our involvement, I am assuming that you are looking at a joint session that would draw on the student petition as well, given that that has its origins in Aberystwyth.

[29] **Joyce Watson:** As long as they are both agreeable to that, I think that that would be an advantage.

[30] **William Powell:** Yes. I would be happy to explore that. Obviously, we need to look at our forward work programme, but I think that we could identify capacity to do that, perhaps not quite as soon as we would wish but nevertheless—. Are colleagues happy with that?

[31] **Russell George:** Yes.

[32] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[33] **William Powell:** Okay. Good. I suppose that, at the same time, it would be sensible for me to respond to the Minister seeking some clarification on some of the specific points that Let Down in Cardiff has made on this particular petition in its latest correspondence.

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[35] **William Powell:** We will move on to petition P-04-573, Call on the Welsh Government to Investigate the Residential Leasehold System in Wales. This petition was submitted by residents of the Elba estate and was first considered by us on 15 July 2014. It collected 263 signatures. We last considered this ahead of the summer recess on 15 July, and we agreed to write to the then Minister for Housing and Regeneration and also to the Welsh Local Government Association to find out whether there were other examples similar to the situation in Swansea that were of concern in other local authorities. We had a response from the Minister. We also have for information a copy of recent press reports regarding a move towards resolution of this particular issue on the Elba estate. The lead petitioner has responded to the Minister's letter and has also given further clarification, which is in our papers today, regarding the press reports. Probably, it would be useful for us to ask the Minister to keep us informed about how this particular situation develops. Do colleagues have any particular insights? I am aware that this is in the heart of Bethan's region.

[36] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I think that we need to understand, given what the petitioner said, that it is quite possible that similar leases have not come up to the 25 years yet—

[37] **William Powell:** There may be a sort of time bomb there that is ticking away.

[38] **Bethan Jenkins:** The specific issue was in the paragraph in the Minister's letter that said:

[39] 'The Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) has also advised Welsh Government officials that they have found absolutely no evidence that this issue exists outside of this estate.'

[40] However, neither we nor the petitioners have seen that evidence. So, on whether that is something that we can access—

[41] **William Powell:** That could be in the public domain, yes.

[42] **Bethan Jenkins:** —so we could understand the situation better, that is something that we should write back on. Also, we should be informed of the outcome of the report, because, as we know, they have only just had a private meeting with the council this week. We do not know the outcome of that, because we do not know whether there will be a positive outcome yet. So, I think that we still need to keep this as a live petition.

09:15

[43] **William Powell:** Yes, that was very much the caution that the petitioner was showing in responding to our interest in recent developments, I think. I am happy to write, addressing both of those points, if colleagues are agreeable.

[44] We turn to petition P-04-597, Protect the future of Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. As colleagues will recall, this petition was submitted by Catherine Patricia Jones and was first considered by us on 23 September, having collected 1,212 electronic signatures and 429 paper signatures—a total of 1,641. Given the highly time-sensitive nature of this, we wrote a number of letters on an urgent basis. We considered the petition last time, as you know, and wrote to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, the Presiding Officer—in that context, in her role as Chair of the Assembly Commission—the Children's Commissioner for Wales and, indeed, Children in Wales. We have received a full set of responses, which are in the public papers. Also relevant to this was the short debate that Bethan Jenkins sponsored just last week in the Assembly. It has not been

possible as yet to get feedback from the lead petitioner. We have not had anything from them as yet, literally because of the timescale. The Minister's response is the one that we have before us, dated 2 October. I am keen to get a steer from colleagues as to whether you think that it would be useful for us to explore an evidence session on these matters, potentially with the petitioners and one or two of the other contributors.

[45] **Russell George:** I would be keen that we do that in some way, Chair—have some kind of oral session—whatever the format. Perhaps we could do it in a different format—although I do not have any suggestions—to how we normally do it, but to encourage younger people to come in. Encouraging them to be able to share their views with us is very important.

[46] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would rather do it in a non-formal way, so that we can collect evidence.

[47] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. I think that we need to be—[*Inaudible.*]

[48] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have given evidence for my Bill and it is really daunting, actually. I feel that we might get more out of it if we just have a conversation, chat to the young people, and perhaps have the children's commissioner there as well, along with someone from the Assembly's external relations team. The children's commissioner talks about the need for shared responsibility in a funding agreement between the National Assembly and Welsh Government, and that is not really being considered by either party. I think that those types of things have to be teased out of the system.

[49] **William Powell:** Yes. There were some very interesting points in the children's commissioner's letter that had not been addressed in the way that things have been handled up to this point.

[50] **Bethan Jenkins:** Also, the Children in Wales letter says that its funding was never intended to create a national democratic structure.

[51] **William Powell:** So, there clearly is still a gap.

[52] **Bethan Jenkins:** That is what, in my view, Jane Hutt was trying to say in her speech on the floor of the Chamber, which was a way of saying, 'Well, we haven't got Funky Dragon any more but this will be something towards that'. However, it is not. It is a different thing entirely. While that may be good in itself, it is not going to be the same thing as having a national parliament for young people. So, we need to really discuss this further.

[53] **William Powell:** I think that we need to have clarity on that, do we not? Joyce, you indicated.

[54] **Joyce Watson:** I definitely think that we should not do it in this setting.

[55] **William Powell:** No. We will explore possible—

[56] **Joyce Watson:** It has worked quite well with other committees to have tables and people sitting there in their groups, so that they feel comfortable, and we move around them.

[57] **William Powell:** Yes. It may be that we could do it in something other than the committee slot as well. It may not be in the best time of day either. That is something that we can at least explore. I realise that it will be difficult with diaries and other pressures, but I think that we need to be flexible.

[58] **Bethan Jenkins:** We can go out of this place as well, can we not?

[59] **William Powell:** Yes, absolutely. It has been a while since we have done so. I think that that is a good point.

[60] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[61] **William Powell:** So, we will explore that with the clerking team. Do you have some thoughts, Steve?

[62] **Mr George:** Who apart from, I assume, Funky Dragon and the children's commissioner, whom you mentioned, would you like to be involved in those discussions?

[63] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would it be possible for us to involve the outreach team of the Assembly, if the Presiding Officer allowed that? I think that the Assembly has a role, and she says in her letter that it wants to encourage debate. I think that that team needs to be part of any discussion on the way forward.

[64] **William Powell:** Potentially, Children in Wales as well, I suppose.

[65] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, I suppose. It is whether it—

[66] **William Powell:** Its letter is quite clear, but it is whether it wants to get involved or not. If it does not, then that will speak for itself.

[67] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could offer it to Children in Wales, but it does not say that that is the role of its project. However, if it feels that it would like to be part of it—

[68] **Mr George:** Just on the outreach team, I am not absolutely clear whether it is because you feel it should facilitate it, or because you feel it should have a role in setting up—

[69] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, I mean, we can discuss that, can we not? I think that it should be part of the discussion, more than to facilitate it. It should be for us to facilitate and for the outreach team to take part, more than anything.

[70] **Mr George:** So, would it be useful to have somebody there from the Assembly Commission, then, if that is the case?

[71] **William Powell:** It would be better that way, would it not? There would be issues of courtesy and responsibility as well that would apply.

[72] **Bethan Jenkins:** Even if it is a member of staff that is—.

[73] **Mr George:** A senior member of staff.

[74] **William Powell:** Okay. I think that that gives a flavour of what we need to do. Doing something that would be a bit innovative, I think, would be helpful, and not in this more formal setting, for reasons that you have outlined. Good.

[75] We now move to P-03-315, New Dyfi River Crossing Petition. This petition was originally considered on 12 July 2011. It was submitted by the South Meirionnydd Older People's Forum, and had the support at that time of 3,204 signatures. We last considered this on 15 July and agreed to seek the Minister's views on the petitioners' correspondence. If you recall, that was with regard to the particular siting of the bridge and also some concerns around particular community impacts. We have a response from the Minister, who has been keeping us up to date on a regular basis, which is appreciated. The lead petitioner has been

asked for his comments, but we have not, as yet, received them. There was a bit of a hiatus, as colleagues will recall, in terms of getting feedback from the petitioners. They have re-emerged, but have not commented on this occasion. So, we need to chase that up, particularly in the context of recent announcements and the information that has been forthcoming from the Welsh Government, and, indeed, the welcome news from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport regarding a funding injection as part of the wider budget package for 2014-15, which I think has been fairly widely welcomed out there. Nevertheless, the petitioners will clearly have a view on that. The whole issue becomes a little bit more urgent.

[76] Are colleagues happy for me to write to seek their views and to seek further information from the Minister, who has been pretty assiduous in keeping us up to the mark on it, to see what the implications are of the recently agreed timetable?

[77] **Russell George:** Chair, I think that it is good that the Minister has highlighted again that there will not be a bypass for Machynlleth—

[78] **William Powell:** That will be reassuring for locals.

[79] **Russell George:** What was particularly alarming was that the petitioner suggested that in a previous e-mail to the committee, but, of course, the original petition does not say anything as such. So, many people would have signed the petition while not agreeing with the later comments. So, I think that it is good that the Minister has clarified that. I welcome that the Minister has kept us updated, and that she has made a commitment to the bridge some time ago, which is excellent. There is no official statement from her at all about any budget arrangements, so I think that it is right that we write to her on that.

[80] **William Powell:** Yes, we need clarity, particularly given that we are dealing with what is a positive story. So, I am happy to make that happen on behalf of the committee. That is agreed.

[81] We now move to P-04-507, A Welsh bill of rights for women and girls: adhering to CEDAW. This petition was submitted by Women's Equality Network Wales, was first considered on 8 October 2013 and has 152 signatures. We last considered the petition in our last meeting before Christmas 2013, on 10 December, and we agreed to ask the petitioners again whether they had any comment on the written correspondence that we had received from the Minister. Since then, we have attempted to contact the lead petitioner, but without success, and it appears that the petitioner is no longer a staff member of CEDAW. Given our inability to progress the petition and the fact that the organisation did not, as such, explicitly endorse it, I think that it is probably time to close it, because we have limited options. Are colleagues happy with that approach?

[82] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, we have no choice, so there is no other avenue for us. However, just to rectify, nobody works for CEDAW; that is the convention. They work for the Women's Equality Network.

[83] **William Powell:** Thank you for that further clarification, Joyce. I know that you have been involved in that sector for a long time. We agree to close the petition.

[84] The next item is P-04-397, Living Wage. This petition was submitted by Save the Children and first considered on 19 June 2012; it has the support of 196 signatures. It was back in June of this year that we considered the petition most recently and agreed to write to the Minister seeking reassurance that the issue would be considered at the forthcoming workforce partnership council meeting, which was due to take place in September, and, of course, to await the outcome of those deliberations. We have now received news from the Minister that that meeting, due to be held in September, was cancelled and that the next

meeting is scheduled for December. So, this sounds like a fixture that is never going to take place, because it is not the first time that there has been a delay in consideration. The lead petitioner was also asked for his comments, but had not responded when papers were issued, and, I think, still has not, has he, Steve? I see that he has not.

[85] **Bethan Jenkins:** That was the case the last time, was it not? We had news of the cancellation of the meeting and the petitioners did not get in touch then either, did they?

[86] **William Powell:** No, that is right. I think that it is important for us to seek some clarification from the Minister and some assurance that the matter will finally be discussed, at least in this calendar year, at the December meeting of the workforce partnership council, but we also need to re-engage with the petitioner. It could be that the petitioners themselves have lost faith in the process, so I think that we need to engage with them to make sure that they are still involved and committed to this matter.

[87] **Joyce Watson:** Chair, a lot of innuendo and assumption has just been stated, so I think that we need to deal with what is in front of us. What is in front of us is that the Minister said that that meeting was cancelled, the next one is going to take place in December and that items for the agenda will be considered with the social partners closer to the meeting. I think that that is the bit of information that we have, so that is what we should be dealing with. We need, quite clearly, to write to the petitioner, letting them know that piece of information. Also, I am in favour of asking the Minister—obviously, the previous meeting was cancelled and we do not know the reason why—for assurances for the petitioner that that meeting is definitely scheduled to go ahead.

[88] **William Powell:** Those are the facts, and that is what we propose to do; I agree. Are colleagues we happy with that? I see that you are.

[89] We now move to P-04-445, Save our Welsh cats and dogs from death on the roads. This petition, as colleagues will recall, was submitted by Monima O'Connor and was first considered on 15 January 2013. It has the support of 10 signatures, but an associated petition had collected approximately 500 signatures. We most recently considered this on 13 May, and, for a number of reasons, driven by workload and other issues, we unfortunately had to decline the invitation that the petitioner kindly extended to us to view premises with an electronic boundary fence. However, we agreed to pass that invitation to the Minister at the time to seek his views as to whether or not that would be a way forward.

09:30

[90] This has been subject to the change of ministerial responsibility, and the new Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, our colleague Rebecca Evans, has now responded and has indicated that her officials may be able to take part in a visit as part of their evidence gathering for the planned review of the Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010. We are grateful to Rebecca for indicating that potential readiness to take up the invitation. We also have some positive comments from the petitioner. At this stage, it would be courteous and consistent for us to share Monima O'Connor's comments with Rebecca Evans and see how this matter can be progressed. Are colleagues content with that approach? I see that you are. Thank you.

[91] The next item is P-04-533, Environmental Planning for Small Scale Wind Turbine Sites. This petition was submitted by GALAR and was first considered on 4 February 2014; it has the support of 433 signatures. We most recently considered this petition on 13 May and agreed at the petitioners' request to allow them additional time to put together a more detailed response to the correspondence that we had received from the Minister. Now that they have kindly done that, I think that probably the best thing for us to do, particularly given that we

are at such an important point in the emergence of the new Planning (Wales) Bill, is to ask the new Minister for Natural Resources for his views on those petitioners' comments. Are you happy with that? I see that you are. Okay, we shall do just that.

[92] The next item P-04-537, Planting Trees to Reduce Flooding. This petition was submitted by Coed Cadw and was first considered on 18 February 2014; it has the support of 2,708 signatures. We most recently considered it back on 15 July and we agreed to write to the Minister at that point. The Minister for Natural Resources has now responded and the letter is available to us in the pack. At this stage, we have asked Coed Cadw for its comments but they had not been received when our papers were issued, and I do not think that we have had a more recent response. So, I think that that is one for us to chase up to see what its perspective is on the comments of the new Minister for Natural Resources. Given that this is a really important issue that is on loads of agendas, I think that we need to progress it with some urgency.

[93] We move to P-04-575, Call in All Opencast Mining Planning Applications. This petition was submitted by United Valleys Action Group and was first considered on 15 July 2014 having collected 130 signatures. An associated petition relating to a specific application had collected in excess of 6,500 signatures. At this point, I should declare an interest in this in as far as I spoke to a large assembly of people at a rally organised by United Valleys Action Group at Ystrad Mynach during the Easter recess in relation to some of these wider issues. I am probably not the only person in the room to have had some association with this and other campaigns. I thought that it was best to put that on the record.

[94] We considered this petition for the first time on 15 July and agreed to write to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration seeking his views on the petition, and also to write to the petitioners highlighting the timetable of the Planning (Wales) Bill, which was launched yesterday. We have a full response from the Minister and we also have some further comments from the petitioners on that. In fact, I think that the petitioners would very much welcome us moving to report on this matter and the opportunity for a debate in Plenary. We have all of that correspondence in our public papers today. To be consistent, I think that it would be right for us to write to Carl Sargeant to see what his views are on the petitioner's further comments. Are there any other thoughts on this one? The Environment and Sustainability Committee comes to mind in connection with this, but we have plenty on.

[95] **Joyce Watson:** We have three Bills.

[96] **William Powell:** Yes, exactly.

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** The Planning (Wales) Bill is something where—. I chair Wales Against Opencast Mining, so I declare an interest for that reason. We are trying to look at the planning Bill, as was; new guidance has come out this week, so I would like for us to be able to look at that. However, the specific point that they are trying to make with regard to the 10-year mark is that quite a lot of the opencast sites are just not getting restored; many councils are defaulting on that responsibility. So, who will do it if the Government does not hold local authorities to account on that? In Kenfig Hill, for example, you have a massive hole filled with water. It is a deep hole in the ground, which is potentially very dangerous to local residents because it is not being restored. So, I would like to reiterate those points to the Minister. While I appreciate that it has been outlined where it should be called in and why it should not always be called in, I do not think that the specific points on that issue have been answered by the Minister. We should then, potentially, move to have a report on it.

[98] **William Powell:** Yes. Also, I would like, for consistency with other similar petitions, to write to the Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, Alun Ffred Jones, just to flag up the petition, because I think that we have failed to do that up to this point—

[99] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[100] **William Powell:** —and I think that that would be sensible also. However, I think that it would be really beneficial for us to draw the strands together, once we have a response from the Minister, in a short and focused report that could then, potentially, trigger the debate that we have been speaking about.

[101] **Joyce Watson:** That is fine by me.

[102] **William Powell:** Okay; good.

[103] We move on to P-04-458, Keep Further Education in the Public Sector. This petition was submitted by the University and College Union's Crosskeys branch and was first considered by us on 19 February 2013; it has the support of 246 signatures. There is an extensive amount of supporting information there, giving the context for this petition; colleagues have this before them. We considered the petition on 13 May 2014 and agreed to write to ColegauCymru seeking information about which colleges had yet to commit to the all-Wales contract. We now have a response from Greg Walker of ColegauCymru, which has also indicated that

[104] 'All the relevant general FE colleges are implementing the national contract'.

[105] The full text of that letter is in our public papers. We have sought the views of the petitioner on the letter received from ColegauCymru, but we have not heard back from them as yet. So, I think that, at this stage, it is probably down to us to chase them for a response. I am sure that they are still concerned about the issue and that it is just that they have not had the opportunity to get back to us. So, I will send a chaser in connection with that, if colleagues are happy.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, we are.

[107] **William Powell:** Staying in the world of further education, we move on to P-04-485, Abuse of casual contracts in Further Education. This petition was submitted by Briony Knibbs and first considered by us on 4 June 2013; it has the support of 674 signatures. We considered the petition on 1 July and agreed to share a research paper, which had kindly been prepared by our research service, with the petitioners and also to consider whether any further action was needed in light of their response. We now have a full response from Briony Knibbs, and that letter is in the public papers. It is indicating, overall, an improving position from their perspective, but there are still areas that are not to their satisfaction. There are a couple of options here. We could be considering closure, given that we seem to be moving in the right direction, but there is also the review, which will not actually report until spring next year. So, I think that it would probably be prudent—

[108] **Joyce Watson:** We could wait. I would not close it now.

[109] **William Powell:** No, I think that it would be sensible to hold off until then, keep a watching brief and then make sure that it is on our agenda just after Easter next year. That would be my suggestion.

[110] **Joyce Watson:** I agree.

[111] **William Powell:** Good. Also, it would probably be useful to write to the Minister, just to get an update from his perspective, because it has been some time since we have heard from him. I think that it would be useful to keep him in the loop as part of our wider

consideration.

[112] **Joyce Watson:** Indeed.

[113] **William Powell:** Staying with the world of education, but a different aspect, we move to P-04-518, Universal Free School Lunches. This petition was submitted by Jane Dodds and was first considered on 26 November 2013. It has the support of 14 signatures. I should declare that I have some association with Jane Dodds, who is a parliamentary candidate for the Montgomeryshire constituency for next May's election. We considered the petition on 13 May 2014 and we agreed to seek further comments from the Minister in the light of the response received from the petitioner. Now, we have a full response from the Minister, and, indeed, some additional comments back from Jane Dodds. These are all in our public papers. Do colleagues think that it would be sensible to share those comments with Huw Lewis for his feedback? I think that there comes a point when that to be ceases to be useful.

[114] **Joyce Watson:** You can, but there comes a point, Chair, when the Minister and the Government have outlined their policy and the policy is abundantly clear. What the policy says is that there are not going to be universal free school lunches in Wales, but that there are alternatives that children can access. So, I do not see any point in doing anything else. We have taken the petition and we have done our work. Whether we like the answer or not, we have gone as far as we can, in my opinion, and I think that we should close it.

[115] **William Powell:** I understand that. Are there any other comments from colleagues?

[116] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not mind us writing back to the Minister on the points that have been made.

[117] **William Powell:** While moving to close, taking on board—

[118] **Bethan Jenkins:** While moving to close, yes. You are not going to get a difference—

[119] **William Powell:** You cannot have a ping-pong of people who take a different view. I understand that.

[120] **Joyce Watson:** That is what we have.

[121] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, because the Minister is not going to change—

[122] **William Powell:** No. I think that we have an established stance from the Minister. Clearly, the petitioner—

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** They can fight it out in the election, can they not, next year?

[124] **Joyce Watson:** Exactly.

[125] **William Powell:** Absolutely. That is a fair comment. I shall share the petitioner's comments with the Minister, as agreed, while moving to close.

[126] **Joyce Watson:** What are your views, Russell?

[127] **Russell George:** I agree with everyone.

[128] **William Powell:** Excellent. Russell George is content, so, we are all happy. [*Laughter.*]

[129] Moving to P-04-408, Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service, this petition was submitted by Helen Missen and was considered on 17 July 2012. It has the support of 246 signatures. Much more recently, colleagues will recall that Helen contributed to a very full and useful evidence session to our committee, for which we are grateful. The committee considered this petition most recently on 1 July 2014, and we agreed to consider petitions P-04-408 and P-04-505, also related to eating disorders, separately because of the different focus of the intentions within those petitions; to draw the petitioners' attention to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into child and adolescent mental health services; and finally also to forward details of the petition to our colleague, Ann Jones, Chair of the CYPE committee. We have a full response from Ann in our papers. While that inquiry is now closed, as colleagues will see, Ann Jones does indicate a readiness to look, with colleagues, at that committee's forward work programme to see whether these matters can be built in. I think that that, at least, is a positive because that would be serving the cause of a more joined-up approach. What do colleagues think that is the best way forward on this matter at this stage?

09:45

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just have a view on process. I think that, perhaps, we can be proactive sometimes and look at what other committees are doing. We had this petition in 2012, and I suppose that it could have been part of the initial inquiry for our committee. You know, we are all doing 20 million things at the same time, but I am just thinking of learning from this. Not to judge anyone—

[131] **William Powell:** It was a learning opportunity that may have been lost.

[132] **Bethan Jenkins:** In future, if we know what the forward work plans are, then, potentially, we could be saying, 'Perhaps this is a discussion for you afterwards' and ask the committee to make it part of its agenda. So, as opposed to us having to write formally, it could be part of the consideration of its forward work programme. However, we are where we are, and we will be reporting soon. Then, we are going to do another piece of work on child and adult mental health services, focusing on the primary care aspects. So, I suppose that the petitioners would need to be aware of—perhaps not looking at the very serious aspect of this petition—how young people are accessing the services initially and how that could stop them reaching that very severe situation, because that is what we will be focusing on in the second strand of our work.

[133] So, I would like them to be involved in that process, really. If they are watching or if they read the Record, because I know they are very conscientious—Helen is—we can encourage them to take part via that system. I do not know where else we could go. I mean, I am happy for us to do a report and have a discussion on it, because we have not had a discussion on this issue for some time.

[134] **William Powell:** That is true.

[135] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that other people, not just the petitioners, are interested in where this petition is going, so we could have a debate, potentially, and go from there, really.

[136] **William Powell:** I think that is a really useful contribution to our consideration of this. I think that there are also some learning points about how we do our business. It is on the agenda later for us to consider how we can maybe refine the way that we do things. Maybe as part of that, we can be a little bit more proactive and a little bit more savvy in terms of what is going on within the wider committee process. I think that that would make a lot of sense.

[137] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, absolutely.

[138] **William Powell:** In the meantime, I would like to write to seek Helen Missen's view on the correspondence that we have received. Excellent. Good.

[139] We now move to P-04-452, Equal Rights for Tube-fed Youngsters. This petition was submitted by Dr Tyandra Blewett-Silcock and was first considered by us on 29 January 2013. It has the support of 142 signatures. We will recall that we had a very useful and compelling evidence session with Dr Blewett-Silcock in 2013, addressing some of these very issues. We considered the petition most recently on 18 February 2014 and we agreed to write to the Minister asking for his views on how the legislation and guidance around direct payments, which is to be rewritten as a consequence of the Social Care and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, will affect the situation. We agreed to share the petitioner's further comments on the difficulties being experienced and also to get in touch with Caerphilly council regarding concerns over the direct payment issue as experienced.

[140] We have got a response from the Minister and we also have further comments from Dr Blewett-Silcock, clarifying her views on that ministerial response. However, as yet, we have not got a response from Caerphilly council, despite reminders, which is unfortunate. I think that we must pursue the issue with Caerphilly council. I do not know whether we have been writing to its senior executives or not, but it might be sensible to copy in the leader of the council, because, obviously, there has been a bit of turbulence there in terms of the very upper echelons of Caerphilly council. So, we do need to elicit a response. It would also be sensible to share Dr Blewett-Silcock's comments, as lead petitioner, with the Minister. Are colleagues happy with that? I see that you are. Good. Thank you.

[141] We now move to P-04-466, Medical Emergency—Preventing the introduction of a poorer Health Service for North Wales. This petition was submitted by Mike Parry and was first considered on 19 March 2013, with the support of 306 signatures. I draw colleagues' attention to the fact that we took evidence on these matters on 12 November 2013 in the session that we held in Prestatyn High School, not just on this petition but also on the petition P-04-479, Tywyn Memorial Hospital X-ray & Minor Injuries Unit Petition. The first of these petitions, as I said, was submitted by Mike Parry, and we considered it initially in March 2013. It enjoys the support of 306 signatures. We last considered this alongside the Tywyn petition on 18 February and we agreed as a committee to write to the acting chief executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board seeking confirmation of the situation regarding minor injuries provision in GP practice in Tywyn and also to seek the views of the petitioner on the announcement by the Minister for Health and Social Services on the

[142] 'study of the issues and opportunities...suited to the specific needs of people living in Mid Wales.'

[143] Since then, Professor Trevor Purt has emerged in a new guise, no longer with Hywel Dda but as the chief executive of Betsi Cadwaladr health board, and we have correspondence from Professor Purt and, indeed, the petitioners on this matter. The petitioners were asked for a response, but, in the case of the first petition, do we still await that response?

[144] **Mr George:** Yes.

[145] **William Powell:** Okay. However, we have received in hard copy and colleagues have got—.

[146] **Mr George:** That is a different petition. It is the later one that is the Ffestiniog one.

[147] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Sorry, that was a mistake on my part. The hard copy

relates to a later petition that we shall be looking at—.

[148] **Russell George:** If we have not had a response yet from the petitioners, let us just wait for that.

[149] **William Powell:** I think that, in this case, that is what we must do.

[150] **Joyce Watson:** That is what we will do, Chair.

[151] **William Powell:** Absolutely. Okay. Good. In relation to the Tywyn Memorial Hospital X-ray and Minor Injuries Unit Petition, just to be clear, have we had a response from them?

[152] **Mr George:** Yes.

[153] **William Powell:** We have, absolutely. That is the one I was confusing with the hard copy in front of us. So, in relation to that, I think that it would be important to share their response with Professor Purt because they have made some specific references to the provision in Tywyn and the situation on the ground. So, it is important that Professor Purt sees that and has the opportunity to respond on behalf of the health board.

[154] **Joyce Watson:** Absolutely.

[155] **William Powell:** Good.

[156] Moving now to P-04-552, Child Protection, this petition was submitted by the Montessori Centre Wales and was first considered by us on 13 May 2014, having collected 40 signatures. We agreed to seek views on the petition from both the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Welsh Local Government Association. In fact, it was the former Deputy Minister for Social Services, Mrs Gwenda Thomas, who took this issue up and who responded on behalf of the Government and, indeed, we also have a response from the WLGA. I think that it would be appropriate to share both of those responses with the Montessori Centre Wales as the lead petitioner to see what perspective it has on those.

[157] **Joyce Watson:** Indeed.

[158] **William Powell:** And now we come to the one that I was wanting to bring in earlier, which is P-04-564, Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital. This petition was submitted by Geraint Vaughn Jones and was first considered by us on 17 June. It has the support of 2,754 signatures. We agreed to write seeking views on the petition from both the Minister for Health and Social Services and the relevant health board, Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board. We have received responses from both, and we have also got the response that I was showing earlier. We have an additional response. We have one set in the papers—

[159] **Mr George:** And this, which has come in late.

[160] **William Powell:** Absolutely. This was sent to me and I forwarded it to the clerking team and to colleagues. Would colleagues appreciate a moment to glean the contents of that second letter? I will give you a moment to refresh your memory of the correspondence of 3 October.

[161] **Joyce Watson:** I have read it.

[162] **William Powell:** Given the specific issues that the chair of the Ffestiniog Memorial

Hospital defence committee, Geraint Vaughn Jones, is taking up, and he is doing it in a fairly forensic way, looking at the correspondence from Professor Purt, it would be appropriate to share this response with Trevor Purt to seek his views and response. Are colleagues happy with that as a means of going forward?

[163] **Joyce Watson:** There are a number of issues here. I spent considerable time—. I have also met with people up there, I have to tell you, because I could not make the meeting that you—

[164] **William Powell:** No, I know, but you did independent research.

[165] **Joyce Watson:** However, I had already been there, and there are a number of factors here. The Marcus Longley report, I think, is a critical part of this, and I asked in the Chamber whether it would include this particular area—

[166] **William Powell:** Yes, I recall that question.

[167] **Joyce Watson:** The answer was a definite ‘yes’. So, we know that it is being considered as part of that inquiry. The other issue—and I am sure that I am right—that I picked up is that the two GPs that they were expecting to deliver some of the local services have now retired and four has come down to zero, according to the petitioners and others. So, all of those things have a knock-on or potential knock-on effect on what is happening, and I think that we really need some answers to all of those questions that have been raised. Also, I am concerned to read the allegations in the hard copy letter that we have. They are quite serious allegations about a GP’s involvement in the restructuring of that service, and we certainly, in fairness, have to have some answers to those, because they are serious.

[168] **William Powell:** People deserve no less, absolutely.

[169] **Joyce Watson:** Both sides deserve no less. The person who is being accused—

[170] **William Powell:** Yes, there are always two sides to these matters. Absolutely.

[171] **Joyce Watson:** —must have an opportunity to respond to those accusations, as well as satisfying those people who have made those accusations or allegations. We would be failing, I think, in our duty if we did not allow those things to happen. So, my comment would be that we definitely need to write to Trevor Purt. We definitely need to raise all of the issues contained— and there are a number of issues—. However, we also need to ask the Minister about his thoughts on how the additionality of this area in that Marcus Longley report might be considered in light of—. And I think that he needs all this information as well.

[172] **William Powell:** I think that that is a very helpful contribution. It is interesting that, as we move towards the end of today’s agenda, there is a link with the very first petition that we received about the future of general practice, because, so often, services can rely on a fairly fragile arrangement, which is based around one, two or three individuals in a practice. I think that that is a useful learning point for us as well.

[173] **Joyce Watson:** They can, and the point is that we need to know if there has been any resolution, and these people definitely need to know that.

[174] **William Powell:** Yes. In light of that, I sense a consensus emerging that we need to write to the Minister and the health board, forwarding this correspondence, to give them the opportunity to respond to the very serious issues raised, some of them in the form of quite detailed concerns voiced by the petitioners.

10:00

[175] I am happy to do that, and I think that we need to do it with some urgency as well. Okay, thank you.

[176] The next update is to P-04-500, Call For Regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in Wales. This petition was submitted, as colleagues will recall, by Lisa Winnett and was first considered on 24 September 2013 and has the support of 265 signatures. We last considered this matter on 3 June when we considered correspondence on the petition and agreed to write to the Minister of the time asking for his views on the report from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Now, the responsibility falls to the Deputy Minister, Rebecca Evans. She has responded indicating that she will respond further once she has had an opportunity to consider the report's findings. In that context, it is only right and proper to give the Deputy Minister time to provide that fuller response, and we look forward to her sharing that with us.

[177] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.

[178] **William Powell:** The next update is to P-04-535, Save our Fire Stations. This petition was submitted by Jonathan Edwards MP and was first considered on 18 February 2014 with the support of 698 signatures. We first considered it on 18 February 2014. We considered correspondence on the wider petition, and we also wrote to a number of different Ministers and agencies—to the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, to the First Minister, to the Fire Brigades Union and to fire and rescue authorities across Wales. A response has been received from the Minister for Local Government and Government Business of the time, and her response is in our public papers. Unfortunately, and somewhat alarmingly, we have not had a response from the FBU, and nor have we had a response from the fire and rescue authorities. So, I think that a chaser letter is probably in order in those connections. We have also yet to receive a response from Jonathan Edwards MP. I think that it would probably be sensible to chase on all fronts, apart from the Minister who has responded, because the matter remains one of great importance and I am sure that it remains important to the petitioner. So, I will do that.

[179] **Bethan Jenkins:** When were they asked for an update?

[180] **William Powell:** In the last few weeks.

[181] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am only asking because I am surprised that the FBU has not answered because there was a rally here last week about protecting services. So, I would have thought that this would be a priority for it.

[182] **William Powell:** Absolutely. We will chase that up and I would be very surprised if we do not have a full response in the near future. It has plenty on, I am sure.

[183] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am not saying that they are ignoring it; it is probably because it has a lot of—. Just so that we do not take that the wrong way.

[184] **William Powell:** They are fighting on all fronts, as I am sure is the MP.

[185] The next update is to P-04-554, An official Welsh Government policy that prohibits non transparent training organisations from working within public bodies. It was submitted by Cymru Sofren/Sovereign Wales and was first considered on 13 May 2014, having the support of 10 signatures. We have a fairly full set of documentation here. It is clear that this is a matter surrounding the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and we are not the relevant body in that connection. I think that we must move to close this as Joyce has been

advocating, while signposting Cymru Sofren to the Information Commissioner's Office and his details. If there are issues there that need to be taken up, I think that that may be appropriate, but it is not something that we can assist with directly.

[186] **Joyce Watson:** Agreed.

[187] **William Powell:** That concludes the consideration of updates today.

10:05

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[188] **William Powell:** We have some matters that we need to discuss about the way we do business in future. I am seeking your support to move into private session in accordance with Standing Order 17.42.

[189] **Joyce Watson:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

[190] **William Powell:** Thank you very much.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:05.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:05.*